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Testimony from Lloyd P. Albert
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Committee on Transportation
SB 285: An Act Concerning the Department of Transportation
March 2, 2016

Mr. Chairman and members of the Transportation Committee . . .

I respectfully ask the Transportation Committee to amend **SB 285: An Act Concerning the Department of Transportation** with language that would strengthen Connecticut's existing seat belt law by requiring all riders in a vehicle, including those in the back seat, to wear a seat belt.

In existing law, language in Sec. 14-100a (c) would require the elimination of two simple words, as follows: *"The operator of and all ~~front~~ seat passengers in any motor vehicle or fire-fighting apparatus originally equipped with seat safety belts, complying with the provisions of 49CFS 571.209, as amended from time to time, shall wear such seat safety belt while the vehicle is being operated on any public roadway or highway, . . ."*

More than 30 years ago, Connecticut moved ahead of the curve nationally with the passage of one of the nation's first mandatory seat belt laws. Now the law in 49 of the 50 states (New Hampshire doesn't have a law for adults), seat belts are estimated to have saved more than 300,000 lives and prevented countless injuries throughout the country during that time. Buckling up is the single most effective action motorists can take to protect their safety and that of their passengers.

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Technology has changed and crash investigations can now pinpoint in greater detail the vulnerabilities of vehicle occupants. The passage of time has revealed that those well-meaning legislators from 1985 may not have been aware of the need to protect all vehicle occupants. The current Connecticut General Assembly does have that opportunity, this year, to extend critical protection to everyone in a car, by simply making the state's seat belt law also apply to rear seat passengers.

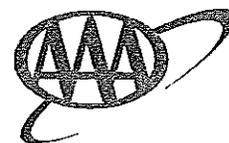
Estimates are that each year in Connecticut more than 120 adults are injured and approximately five adults die who were unbelted rear seat occupants. Dating back to 1995 that equates to close to 100 deaths and 2,500 injuries.

Over a quarter of adults don't use a seat belt in the rear of the car. Perhaps they are lulled into a false sense of security, but research highlights just how dangerous it is to ride in the back seat unbelted. A recent study shows that although adults make up only 21 percent of rear-seat occupants, they account for 52 percent of deaths and 60 percent of serious injuries sustained in the back seat, primarily due to that lower rate of seat belt usage. In essence, by not buckling up in the back seat, you are 8 times more likely to be seriously injured in a crash and twice as likely to cause a front-seat occupant to die in a wreck by becoming a projectile.

It's imperative that legislators require Connecticut residents to follow the advice of safety experts who recommend that all vehicle occupants wear seat belts at all times. AAA members agree: statewide surveys conducted by AAA in Connecticut show that nearly 7 in 10 members believe seat belts should be mandatory for back seat passengers, regardless of age.

The Connecticut Department of Transportation proposed this measure last year, but it didn't make it out of committee. And while the current legislative session is shortened and dealing primarily with fiscal issues, AAA feels it would be wrong to wait another year while more of our fellow citizens, friends and family members are injured or killed.

One simple click of a seat belt is all it takes to increase the chances of not becoming a statistic. Twenty-eight states and the District of Columbia require that all back seat passengers buckle up. AAA urges the legislature to make 2016 the year Connecticut does the right thing for safety and correct a law that was intended to protect everyone in a vehicle, regardless of where they are seated.



Connecticut Rear-Seat Seat Belt Coalition

The following organizations and individuals support the strengthening of CT's existing seat belt law. As a Coalition, we ask the Transportation Committee to revise **SB 285 – An Act Concerning the Department of Transportation** to reflect language that would strengthen Sec. 14 -100a (c) by requiring all riders in a vehicle including those riding in the back seat to wear a seat belt.

That language would read as follows: *"The operator of and any ~~front~~ seat passenger in any motor vehicle or fire-fighting apparatus originally equipped with seat safety belts, complying with the provisions of 49CFS 571.209, as amended from time to time, shall wear such seat safety belt while the vehicle is being operated on any public roadway or highway . . ."*

- AAA Northeast
- AAA Allied Group
- Advocates for Highway & Auto Safety, Washington DC
- American Academy of Pediatrics, CT Chapter
- CT Safe Kids
- Connecticut Children's Medical Center
- Fairfield Police Department
- Kelley Mason Family of Guilford
- Mothers Against Drunk Driving, CT State Office
- Motor Transport Association of Connecticut
- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA)
- National Safety Council, Washington DC
- Newtown Police Department
- Norwalk Police Department
- Redding Police Department
- Injury Prevention Center – Connecticut Children's Medical Center
- Attorney Tim Hollister, author of "Not So Fast" and the blog "From Reid's Dad"
- Garry Lapidus, PA-C, MPH, Director, Injury Prevention Center – Connecticut Children's Medical Center/Hartford Hospital & Associate Professor of Pediatrics & Public Health, UCONN School of Medicine
- Fairfield Police Chief Gary MacNamara
- Norwalk Police Chief Thomas Kulhawik
- Newtown Police Chief James Viadero

